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# On E-Learning & Continuing Education for LIS Staff

Yafan Song

E-learning, or On-line learning or Networked learning, is one of the educational modes based on advanced multimedia technology, independent learning of individuals together with mutual study of members for a certain group or collectivity. Popularly, it is a manner of learning through establishing Internet platform in educational field, by which learners access educational resources using their PC, talk with teachers and discuss with other learners. E-learning, with its particular and unique features, impregnates new energy to educational development, especially the continuing education for LIS staff. In this paper, through probing into characters of E-Learning and its usage in continuing education for LIS staff, the author tries to expatiate innovations it brought about on principle, policy, environment and modes of continuing education as well as our thoughts on it and put forward suggestions on how to improve continuing education for library workers in China .

**Keywords:** E-learning, Librarians, Continuing education, Life-long education, Life-long learning

It is a fact that the Internet, with its infinite capacity, broad area of covering, alternative and customized features, is transforming the way we work, live, entertain and study, as well as the traditions we are accustomed for a long period of time. And now we have entered into an E-world: E-mail, E-cash, E-business, E-management, E-library and E-learning. (Zheng Xuliang 2003)

## 1 What is the E-learning?

E-learning, or On-line learning or Networked learning, is one of the educational modes based on advanced multimedia technology, independent learning of individuals together with mutual study of members for a certain group or collectivity. Popularly, it is a manner of learning through establishing Internet platform in educational field, by which learners can access educational resources using their PC, talk with teachers and discuss with other learners. E-learning, with its particular and unique features, impregnates new energy to educational development, especially the continuing education for LIS staff.

## 2 The Characteristics and Application of E-learning

### 2.1 The Characteristics and Application of E-learning

E-learning is a new mode of networked learning environment which comprised of

multimedia on-line resources, on-line learning community and networked technical support and features as follows:

- (1) **Rich in resources for learning:** In networked environment there exist a large number of data, achieves, procedures, teaching soft-ware, discussion groups, news, etc., all those congregated in a highly integrated repository and are convenient for users to access.
- (2) **Openly to all the learners:** It means all the learners can use these resources at the same time without any limitation as long as they have PC and log in. Furthermore, they can also express their opinions and add their resources to the networked repository for sharing.
- (3) **Quick at renewing of knowledge:** As we know, print books or textbooks are often used for several years or decades, while under E-Learning mode, courseware can be created and renewed timely so that it can provide learners with the most new and practical knowledge and skills for studying.
- (4) **Flexible and diversified for the learning modes,** such as:
  - Personally: On Internet, learners can select and decide what to learn or what kind of learning modes to be used according to their own needs or interests, on which they propose their objectives. During practicing, they can assess their levels and find out their disparities so as to strengthen their weakness based on results.
  - Co-operatively: On Internet, learners can not only load down teaching materials, home-works as well as references but can also ask questions to their teachers far away, discuss or assess the content with colleagues everywhere, which are helpful and active for improving the ability of thinking and communicating, and forming creative and innovative mode of thinking.
- (5) **Helpful to train learners to be active and creative both in thinking and practicing:** That is to say, learning through network is helpful to strengthen learners' the ability of thinking and practicing creatively which include positive attitude for acquiring knowledge, keen observation, creative imagination, unique structure of knowledge and dynamic inspiration, as well as the ability of practical operation, organization and management, opening and transferring creative achievements, as well as hunting for and handling information.

In addition, with the aim of mastering the ability of acquiring knowledge but not the knowledge itself, E-learning is surely helpful to train learners to be interested in information technology and try their best to understand and grasp the basic knowledge and skills in the area.

## **2.2 The Application of E-learning**

Being the new mode of long distant education and professional training, the early use of E-Learning began with teaching and scholar study, then in establishment of Study organization among enterprises, that is, in education both in and outside enterprises for training their employees and customers. Broadly speaking, E-Learning covers all kinds of study by means of e-technology, but the most popular E-Learning at present means long

distant education both for formal schooling and E-training.

According to statistics, in the United States, more and more people choose to learn through network, the number of which increases at 300 % each year. More than 60% of enterprises train employees by using this manner. In Asia, E-Learning develops fast in many countries, such as Singapore, Japan and Korea. In China, with the improvement in utilization of Internet, people began to recognize E-Learning, about 54.7% of the respondents believe that networked education is the most competitive one for network enterprise, and 33% of them have desire to choose On-line learning. It is said that in Chinese market, corporations or enterprises will spend 23,000 million US\$ in on-line education or training.

### **3 E-learning vs. Continuing Education for LIS Staff**

#### **3.1 Continuing Education for LIS Staff**

Continuing education sprang up at 1960s, which has been stressing and promoting greatly by international institutions such as United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In the report "Learning: The Treasure Within" published in 1996, it emphasized the importance of life-long education to the development of human beings. Promoted by this conception and agitated by "all study" movement in the world, continuing education for librarians have been given more attention in this field internationally. During the period of 1990s, the Section on Education and Training of International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) had as an ultimate mission to improve Library and Information Science education and to strengthen the link between the basic education and continuing education or continuing professional development for librarians and paraprofessionals. Further it put forward the following action principles at each period of time:

- (1) Foster international cooperation on basic and continuing education of library and information science (LIS) educators and practitioners.
- (2) Uphold and strengthen the academic and professional status of LIS staff through international recognized qualifications for LIS positions.
- (3) Maintain a current directory of world-wide LIS educational programs
- (4) Foster the multicultural principles of IFLA
- (5) Offer professional development opportunities for LIS professionals and education in developing countries
- (6) Disseminate information on innovative curriculum development and creative teaching methodologies and materials
- (7) Foster new professional development opportunities in order to encourage new knowledge, skills and competencies
- (8) Encourage high quality conference papers through a rigorous refereeing process
- (9) Foster a process that encompasses both standard educational requirements and continuing education as focus for the work of the section

According to the above, activities and programs have been organized and will be carried out, which include: (1) Complete the project that ends both with a database and with a print publication at the end of 2003, with funds pledged from IFLA, UNESCO and Saur. (2) Take

action to establish a high degree of participation and work delegation among all elected members of the Section; (3) Evaluate the need for a revision of the standards for LIS Educational Programs to keep it up to date on a continuous basis; (4) Explore ways to have corresponding members of the section from cultures and countries not represented on the Standing Committee to become more active through more regular communications with the Section; (5) Explore ways to have corresponding members of the section from cultures and countries not represented on the Standing Committee to become more active through more regular communications with the Section; (6) Continue with plans for the Buenos Aires conference in 2004, including coming up with an acceptable title for the themes of the Open Session and Workshop and attending to details of funding for the lunch at the Workshop; (7) Finalize and implement plans for joint PreConference institute in Geneva for 2003 on "E-Learning for Training in Marketing and Management of Libraries." From which we can see that IFLA made great contributions to continuing education for librarians in the world.

### **3.2 The Application of E-learning in Continuing Education for Librarians**

The successful case must be the course offered by OCLC named Professional Development: On-line learning, which can be used for librarians all over the world as long as they have PC and links to the Internet. In the catalog, there are more than 600 on-line technical courses which deliver what you need, when you need it, no matter where you are, at home or at work. If you are not sure whether this style of learning is right for you, you can try a free demo course (<http://institute.oclc.org/demos.shtml>) to be sure. It can help you learn the skills you want quickly and comprehensively. These demo courses contain examples of many of the features that make OCLC courses outstanding.

Four low-cost course groups provide breadth and depth in select areas and convenient access to topics and courses that you need now and later. Available Course Groups are as follows (Table 1):

**Table 1: The Available Course Groups**

Curriculum	Number of Series	Number of Subjects	Fee (US\$/Y)
End User Desktop Computing	35	185	59.95
Technical General	32	223	119.95
Technical MCSE	25	197	119.95
Technical Web Development	20	124	119.95

**Other on-line learning coming soon:** OCLC product tutorials and lessons

CatExpress tutorial

CatME lessons

Introduction to MARC Tagging: An OCLC tutorial

Learning to Use OCLC CJK Software

OCLC ILL Web tutorial

Searching WorldCat tutorial

Connexion training

Using ILL tutorial

Using Pathfinders: An OCLC tutorial

Using the OCLC Digital Archive: An OCLC Tutorial WebDewey tutorial

**Training needs of library staff**

In 2002, OCLC commissioned a distance training and education market needs assessment of library workers worldwide. The study was conducted through the use of a Web-based survey instrument. About 2, 112 responses to the survey were received, 32% of which were outside of the US. The survey covers: (1) a benchmark for library spending on training; (2) a benchmark for the amount of training library workers receive; (3) the kinds of training needed by library workers; (4) trend in Web-based training for library workers; (5) where to focus in efforts in the development of Web-based training. And in the report, OCLC announced its key findings of the study and discussed the conclusions it drew from the survey data. In addition, it reported the activities in the area of Web-based course offerings.

The 10 key findings include:

- (1) Managerial respondents (59%) are more open to Web-based distance-learning than individual contributors (28%);
- (2) At present, institutions support and fund traditional training programs for library workers rather than emerging alternatives like Web-based distance learning;
- (3) Web-based training is an option that will become increasingly important to library community;
- (4) Three skills are in high numbers for training needs:
  - Library standards and practices (Creating digital library; Collection development and management; Database searching);
  - Management skills (Change and innovations; Leadership; Marketing the library);
  - Computing / Information technology (Web development and design; Library automation; Computers, networks and operating systems).
- (5) Respondents have very positive regard for continuing education for library workers and satisfaction with Web-based learning is high;
- (6) Respondents see strong benefits in Web-based distance learning;
- (7) The perceived problems with Web-based training are relative to the value of the course , not the technical platform;
- (8) The number one reason for continuing training and education for library workers is for “keeping current”;
- (9) The average total training budget for all library workers within an institution is \$12,067 or about one-half of one percent of the library’s total operating budget;
- (10) Respondents believe that they are under-spending on training and education programs. Web-based distance learning is regarded as a cost-effective option.

The top problems noted by respondents are trouble finding the time (42%); finding the right course / topics (32%); getting funding (32%) and knowing what courses are available (26%).

**4 Thoughts on What E-learning Brings to Us**

Now, libraries are facing an environment of significant resource constraints. Meanwhile, acquiring new skills and keeping current on technologies, sources and trends are more

important than ever for library staff. The adoption of E-learning is the reasonable answer to this dilemma, and efforts should be made to enlighten the application of E-learning as a solution that provides a low-cost opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills for library staff. Toward this, the following should be strengthened imminently:

#### **4.1 Promoting the Concept of Life-long Learning among Librarians**

On the whole, the qualification of professionals who work in library and information circle in China is not as high as that in some advanced countries. For instance, all the Librarians or directors at 2,000 university libraries in the US have got Master Degree in LIS, while among 618 directors at 158 university libraries in 20 cities or provinces in China, only 10% have Master Degree, undergraduates and junior college students account for 81.3% and 2.4%, the rest graduated from technical secondary school or have no academic certificates. For library workers in China, who have academic certificates above junior college make up 53.6%, while 89% of American librarians have Master Degree. Through which we can see we still have a long way to go in continuing education for Chinese library workers. To improve the qualification of professionals wholly, the concept of life-long learning should be stressed among librarians, meanwhile, we should promote "all librarians learning" under the movement "all study" in the world. Through the efforts by all librarians to be aware of the importance of life-long learning and actively participate in study activities, the qualification of librarians in China will be surely improved and strengthened.

#### **4.2 Establishing Policies and Rules on Continuing Education for LIS Staff**

It is reported that in the world today there are 250 library laws or regulations established over 60 countries or regions, that's to say nearly 33% of countries have their own library laws or byelaws in which there list items relating continuing education for LIS staff. Among those countries, United States and Great Britain are the earliest ones that gave clear definition on continuing education for LIS staff in library administration rules in 1960s. Furthermore, the American Society for Information Science (ASIS) has also stipulated in its policy of manpower resource development that "Library administrators have responsibilities for environment and conditions created for library staff to receive continuing education".

#### **4.3 New Modes of Education in the New Era**

At present, some new initiating systems have been set up in some developed countries which impart learners to what they need with advanced technology at anytime and anywhere such as the Professional Development: on-line learning, a distance course launched by OCLC Institute. In our country, the first skeleton network "China Education and Research Network (shortly CERNET) has already linked more than 700 universities and institutes in 140 cities with 4,000,000 users." Connection of satellite networks with CERNET forms an advanced distance educational network with alternative functions which greatly expands education scopes both in time and space.

#### **4.4 Taking Full Advantage of E-learning**

For a long period of time, education for librarians has been limited to such confined ways as attending train classes, listening to the lectures, taking part in symposiums or conferences, being taught by correspondence, watching kinescope, etc. Education in those

traditional manners aims at commanding knowledge and only a few but not everyone have opportunities to attend the above lectures or conferences. As a matter of fact, most of librarians lost opportunity and right to share continuing education after they graduated from college or at their working positions.

#### 4.5 Integrating Educational Resources

Educational resources for LIS staff covers all the subjects of library science in content, and involving knowledge of computer technology, network technology and communication technology. As for the type of resources, it should include print books and periodicals, e-resources, multimedia resources and networked resources. Since there is no specific resources for continuing education for LIS staff in China up to date, it is difficult for librarians to access and utilize these resources scattered everywhere on the Internet by limitation on time, location, equipment, environment or fund. According to survey on networked information resources, the distribution of resources in this circle tends to be as follows (Table 2 Examples of distribution of resources):

**Table 2: Examples of Distribution of Resources**

System	Organization	Resources offered
Univ. and college libs.	Peking Univ. Lib.	Basic resources, Organizations, Digital lib., Publications, Conferences and forums, Educational department, Faculty, Related links, etc.
	Shanghai Jiaotong Univ. Lib.	Navigation links to all kinds of libs. both home and abroad.
LIS departments in Univs. and colleges	Department of Information Management, Peking Univ.	Teaching materials and courseware used for education and training, providing distance education and continuing education.
	School of Information Management Wuhan Univ.	Teaching materials and courseware used for education and training, including network classroom.
Research organizations or institutes	Lib. of Chinese Academy of Sciences	All kinds of training materials on LIS subjects covering Doctor & Master Degree education as well as Visiting Scholar Program, and continuing education for different level of library workers
Public libs.	National Lib. of China	Training materials on related lectures for lib. work
Others	Personal Web-sites or homepages	Working papers, monographs, discussion groups on interesting issues, etc.

For high level research and study both theoretical and practical, the resources also include those integrated from different kinds of libraries, LIS departments, research organizations or institutes of foreign countries.

As to the integration for the above resources, the best way is considered to be as follows: Firstly, make survey both on resources and requirements toward continuing education for LIS staff. Then set up a program through authorized sector of government for editing and creating a series of courses or courseware which can be made by an influenced educational or research institute for the application of library workers and researchers at all levels.



## 5 Conclusion

Facing challenges brought forward by E-learning and adapting themselves to transformation on both the concept and modes of learning, librarians should strengthen the ability for better utilizing this new mode of learning.

- (1) Know the basic knowledge of computer and network. E-Learning provides us with a networked virtual space which constitutes with computer and its links. So, librarians should have these knowledge at first.
- (2) Strengthen ability of handling information. Based on computer and network knowledge and the ability of operation, librarian should learn how to retrieve, handle and exchange information on Internet by using computer. Through learning searching knowledge and skills for documents, networked information and electronic resources, knowing well of retrieval orders, manners and process for each databases, so as to master the way and policy for better understanding information reception, setting searching strategies in user services.
- (3) Learn to grasp foreign languages. Statistical figure shows that languages used at most on the net space are English (84%), German (4.5%), Japanese (3.1%), French (1.8%). So, English is very important for librarians not only to access resources on Internet, but to learn what they are need from network, such as curriculum or training courses provided by IFLA, OCLC, etc.

As mentioned the above, being a new mode of study, E-Learning is bringing great changes on all aspects of continuing education for LIS staff, and providing opportunities and prospects for improving the level of theory, renewing and expanding professional knowledge, reforming the makeup of capacity to librarians, which will help them to become competitive information experts. Toward this, the active participation and mutual action are considered to be the main points for success.

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